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**Relation between the domestic dogs'**

***well-being and life expectancy***

**statistical essay**

***Essay for the Prince Laurent Foundation Price***

Year 2003

## Summary for a large public

The dog shares our lives inside our houses. It is true in all respect. Since the dog was domesticated, it moved away from its cousin the wolf, and became fully dependent from its living environment : the man and the houses. This does not change if our dog is a working animal, such as the Malines shepherd in the army or the police, or an every day poodle. We are responsible for it and we have to take care of it. We have to supply it with what it needs in terms of quality and quantity.

To do it the best way, we have to know what is the best for our friend : Which is the best housing environment, how to protect it from diseases, what to prepare in terms of food to fulfill its nutritional needs. These are just a few of the questions raised in order to give it a quality of life in accordance with its fundamental needs and offer to the animal a quality of life together with an acceptable life expectancy.

Our investigation gave us the possibility to study the various characteristics that could influence the dogs' life expectancy. These characteristics could be proper to the dog such as the race, its type, the size, the weight, but also other characteristics which could influence the dogs' age of death such as the food, its living condition, the family environment, all characteristics which are not dependent from the dog but from the owner. He will therefore have a prominent influence on these characteristics, which influences directly the quality of life and the well being of the dog.

In 1998 we started with a statistical study, collecting data in order to support our analysis. This study continues. With it we collected information and data for 522 dogs during a period of five consecutive years. The goal of our analysis was to examine the influence on the life expectancy factor of characteristics, directly related to the dog such as : sex, race and size. But also characteristics imposed by the owners, following his own choice and decision : is the animal sterilized or not, what is its housing and family environment, what is its origin, which type of food does it get ?

In order to do so, we had to collect and study a sufficient number of information. We did so with the assistance of "Animals without Frontiers", collecting data from proprietors of dead dogs. Their responsibility was to transport the bodies, coming from all over Belgium, to the incinerator in Boom. An I.D. Sheet with all characteristics listed above was completed for each dog. We are presenting you the result of our study.

The essential individual characteristics (intrinsic parameters) such as race and size have a major influence on the life expectancy. The owner has no control over these characteristics. If he wishes to do so, he could influence the external acquired characteristics (extrinsic parameters). The study evaluates that housing and family configuration, have no significant impact on the life expectancy.

The two most influential external acquired characteristics ( imposed by the proprietor) are the sterilization and the type of food.

Sterilization raises the average middle age of the dead in the dog species. (12 years and 3 months for sterilized animals, 10 years and 6 months for non-sterilized) This will permit a reduction in the importance of certain illnesses such as cancer, or inflammation of the genital organs.

Our study shows that for food, the animal fed with home made food (based on similar food as the family) reach an average age of 13.1 years, as the animals fed with canned industrial food, reach an average age of 10.4 years. The animals fed with mixed food (home made plus canned food) reach an average age of 11.4 years.

The difference between the two extremes amounts to more than 32 months, i.e. close to 3 years. This great difference shows that food is a major and determinant factor for the dogs' life expectancy. Giving it home made food is a guarantee for better protection, well being and longer life expectancy.

What makes the difference between the two types of food ? (home made and industrial canned food) It is the basic quality of the ingredients used ( quality of the basic protein, quantity and faculty to assimilate vitamins and minerals when using natural products...) the importance of physical or chemicals treatments applied during the fabrication process. Indeed, canned-food processing requires various physical treatments : ( high temperature, lyophilisation, extrusion, flaking) and also chemicals treatments :(hydrolysis, coloring, additives.....)

It is clear from our analysis that the implication of the proprietor of the dog in the selection of food served to the animal is of the greatest importance and that the life expectancy for his dog is directly related with the quality of the food.

The nature reasserts its rights and shows its value and importance. Taking into consideration the importance of the diet and its quality, shown as a dominant factor for the dogs' life expectancy, we think that it is essential that all parties concerned, i.e. labs' researchers, manufacturers, veterinarians, proprietors, come together and talk in order to give complete satisfaction to the animals' nutritional requirements and improve, this way its **“WELL BEING”**